Dana L. Ferguson
Statement to Begin Worship
November 2, 2008
8:00, 9:30 and 11:00 AM Services

We have suffered a very significant and painful loss this past week. As most of you know, Dana Ferguson, our Executive Associate pastor, died last Monday. Her funeral was here on Friday afternoon. We said good-bye to Dana in the way she wanted, and planned: with a traditional, full Fourth Church worship service: hymns, scripture, prayers, Morning Choir and Tower Brass, and a full sermon. When she asked me, two weeks ago, if I would preach at her funeral, she added a condition: "I want a real sermon, not one of those little Funeral Meditations."

So we celebrated her life, her ministry and service to this church, and her faith — which was so authentic and deep and which was the unshakable foundation upon which she rested as her illness progressed over the past months.

We miss Dana very much. We will miss her for a long time.

She loved this church, loved everything about it, loved being responsible for its day-to-day operations, loved the staff which she led so effectively: her fellow ministers, musicians, educators, counselors, mission personnel, house staff. She knew everyone: had a smile and a compliment or encouraging word for

each. She knew how to be a servant leader and we loved her for it.

She loved her life with an irrepressible exuberance: she loved being married to Wayne, she loved being a mother to Daniel and Taylor. She loved her friends — to whom she was devoted. She loved to laugh. I will miss the sound of her laugh which was audible all over the church offices. Her former colleague, John Wilkinson, who was her predecessor as Executive Associate Pastor, said simply: "She made me laugh more than anybody." Her passion for life expressed itself in those fabulous, colorful tights she wore beneath her robe and clerical garb.

She loved the mission of Fourth Church. That is what drew her here eleven years ago. From the beginnings of her ministry in Idlewild Presbyterian Church, Memphis, and continuing here in Chicago, Dana had a deep commitment to the Gospel's imperative about love for neighbor, particularly the needy neighbor, justice for neighbor, particularly the neighbor who is on the margins. She oversaw our mission program: Tutoring, Near North Magnet Cluster Schools, Scholarship, Social Service Center, Centers for Life and Learning and Whole Health. And she led us to ask about the future and what new mission to which God was calling us. She was first to understand the Chicago Housing Authority's Plan for Transition and bold aspiration to create an

authentically diverse urban neighborhood, racially and economically. "We need to be part of that" she said. "We need to be right in the midst of it." The result was the purchase of a piece of property on Chicago Avenue for a Community Center — an anchor, a bridge — for the new neighbors who will live there. That dream is temporarily on hold as Project Light continues to try to understand and cope with political and neighborhood opposition. Currently there is a wonderful neighborhood garden on the property — a symbol of the church's and Dana Ferguson's commitment to the city.

She led and participated in mission trips to Cuba, Honduras, Israel-Palestine

and, with Habitat for Humanity, New Orleans.

We will miss her worship leadership, her presence on Sunday morning, attending to every small detail to make sure this act of praise and adoration to God is done right: but also her elegant preaching and beautiful prayers which brought to God both the big national and international issues of the day, but the intimate personal matters of our hearts.

We will miss her. But thanks be to God for her life, for the gift of her ministry and friendship, for her commitment to mission and for her deep and abiding faith in God.

This church is better and more faithful for her having been here.

We are all better for Dana Ferguson's having touched our lives.

We commend her to God's steadfast love knowing that nothing — not even death — can separate her, or any of us, from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now let us worship God.